

GOTHIC ARM-RESTS.



MILTON CHURCH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE.



ASTLEY CHURCH, WARWICKSHIRE.

CARVED ARM-RESTS.

THE poppy-head is an enrichment of the bench-end, which has of late years excited to a great extent the attention of ecclesiologists. But in doing justice to it they have generally neglected an ornament of greater rarity and nearly equal interest—the arm-rest. Yet to this object was a vast amount of taste and imagination devoted during the middle ages, and the variety of invention which remaining examples evince, vies with that which appear upon coteremporary poppy-heads. They were either formed of grotesque heads and animals, or were worked into Gothic foliage, well rounded in the upper parts, with due regard to the purpose for which they were intended. A specimen is here given of each particular kind. The first engraving represents the front and side views of an arm-rest from the carved oak stalls in Milton Church, near Cambridge, and exhibits one of those singular conceptions which have occasioned so much discussion in the archaeological world, but which, according to the positions in which they are found, are supposed to bear allusions to the quarrel between the secular and regular clergy. A lion's head with open mouth and extended tongue is furnished with a mitre, which in this instance is a happily chosen object, from its taking the same outline as the section of the moulding to which it forms a stop. The second illustration is from the simpler stalls in Astley Church, Warwickshire—a small but elegant edifice, recently visited by the Archaeological Association. It consists of a bold leaf, which lies over the moulding, but, unlike the former example, is executed with that view to economy which produces a good result without waste of material.

ARCHITECTURAL CRITICISM.

Of all the fine arts, architecture is that most subject to criticism. Men of every rank and degree discourse (soundly or unsoundly) of the merits or defects of an important edifice, while the number of those who examine with more than passing interest a statue or picture, is even yet comparatively few. The more general interest which architecture commands is due partly to material causes, and partly to the effects of association and reflection. The works of architecture exceed those of other arts in magnitude, costliness, number, conspicuousness, permanence, and direct utility; and each of these qualities is a simple reason for the prevalence of architectural criticism. For magnitude and costliness of labour and materials appeal directly to the senses, and produce impression on every mind, whether educated or uneducated: the superior number and conspicuousness of architectural works induce examination by increasing its facilities and opportunities; the permanence of architecture associates with it the feeling of reverence for antiquity, and the zeal of fame among posterity; and, lastly, the direct utility of edifices

invests them with an obvious importance and dignity which belong to no other works of art. The supremacy of architecture consists in this; that it does not merely delight the eye or the imagination, but satisfies the judgment also; it comprehends the highest source of intellectual enjoyment, by successfully accomplishing the delicate and difficult task of adapting the principles of beauty to economical purposes.

These characteristics of architecture, if properly estimated, and traced to their consequences, accurately account for the universality and enthusiasm of the devotion which it claims. Even the votaries of the other arts have yielded to it the homage due to sovereignty. The greatest painter and the noblest sculptor of Christian Europe voluntarily relinquished the labours of the studio to devote themselves to its service. And while, on the one hand, the most exalted intellects have ministered to its glory, the humblest have, on the other, testified to its power. The unlettered peasant cannot cross the stupendous nave of Winchester, or gaze on the magnificence of Cologne, without reverence, and even the little child traverses the wonderful cathedral aisles with timid heedful steps.

It is a natural consequence of this general interest that architecture should excite more frequent discussions than any other art. But, in general, these discussions proceed on no established systematic principles, but are the mere expression of individual approbation or dislike. It is impossible, however, that any debate can produce sound conclusions unless some fundamental principles be assumed and conceded on both sides: an architectural discussion which does not proceed on acknowledged axioms is neither more nor less than a strife of words—a logomachy.

The present object of the writer is to examine how far it be possible to make architectural criticism a scientific system. In law the decision of a judge is founded, not upon his own individual opinion, but on fixed principles of jurisprudence, which it is beyond his power to alter. But, in architecture, it has been too much the custom to receive the critical dicta on their own authority. Another man has no right to impose on me his private opinion, unless he can shew that it is founded on something better than caprice or prejudice; his decision cannot carry authority unless it produce conviction; cannot produce conviction unless deduced from necessary principles.

Now there are many who assert that there are no necessary principles of architectural beauty—that men admire particular styles simply because they are used to them. This class of thinkers, who oppose us on the very outset of the subject, argue that the Greek venerated the architecture of the Parthenon, the mediæval Christian that of Cologne, the Hindoo that of Elephanta, for precisely the same reason that the African admires the black skin and large features of his own race, while the European, deeming those characteristics hideous, can discern no beauty save in the

class of features and complexions to which he has been accustomed from birth. It is absolutely necessary that this objection should be met at once, for otherwise it is fatal to our subject at its very commencement. The argument in question is not one of merely abstract interest: by denying the existence of necessary principles of beauty, it renders architecture purely conventional and arbitrary, and reduces us to the necessity of one or other of the following conclusions; either that it is an abuse of language to call one style of architecture *better* than another (because every style is suggested by individual caprice, and one man's caprice is as valuable as another's); or, secondly, that the best architecture, in every country, is that which most strictly conforms with established usage.

The following answer seems sufficient. We concede that local associations have a powerful influence on architectural taste, that many nations admire their architecture simply because it is their own, and endeared to them by the earliest recollections of their history. But it does not follow, that because a powerful motive of this kind exists, it exists alone. It is possible, at least, other motives of admiration may co-exist, corroborating the motives of association where both agree, or overcome by the latter, where the two classes of motives are opposed. If no other motives but those of association determined the adoption of particular styles, it is clear that no nation could see merit in any architecture but its own, whereas numerous examples to the contrary exist. There prevails throughout northern Europe a universal admiration of the temples of Athens, and natives of the East are found to be powerfully impressed by the contemplation of Christian cathedrals. Moreover, it is obvious, that even if local association were the sole motive for retaining a particular architecture, some other motive must have existed for its original adoption. It must have found some other cause of favour in the eyes of its first inventors, and of their contemporaries, whose approval led to its perpetuation.

If, then, among these additional motives, we can find some which are of universal application—true for all time and under all circumstances—it is clear that we shall have arrived at the essential criterion of architectural beauty; and if these criteria be susceptible of philosophical and systematic arrangement, they will constitute a true and logical science—the science of architectural taste.

It must be premised that it is necessary to look beyond architecture itself for the discovery of these criteria; for, on account of the influence of the accidental association already referred to, no one system of architecture has obtained the admiration of all ages and all nations. Pointed architecture, after being exclusively practised throughout Europe for many centuries, subsequently came to be considered a production of the dark ages. Grecian architecture, when the knowledge of it was first revived in this country by the labours of Stuart and Revett, was condemned by many